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By: Staff Sgt. Karima Turner

Alaska Army National Guard deploys to Afghanistan alongside Mongolians

CAMP DENALI, Alaska—Two Alaska Army National Guardsmen are preparing to deploy to Afghanistan later this month as U.S. liaisons in support of the Mongolian Expeditionary Task Forces (METF) in Afghanistan.

Capt. Rafael Pacheco, 49th Ground Missile Defense senior tactical director, and Sgt. 1st Class Paul "Marc" Wonder, Alaska Army National Guard assistant operations noncommissioned officer, will be the sixth team from the Alaska Army National Guard paired with the Mongolian Expeditionary Task Forces as tactical advisors and liaisons in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

As liaisons, the team will be the METF's direct link to the U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and the Base Support Group at Camp Eggers and other sites in the country.

Pacheco, of Anchorage, and Wonder, of Palmer, departed Alaska in early March for Fort Benning, Ga., where they are in the midst of approximately two weeks of pre-mobilization training before leaving for Camp Eggers in Kabul, Afghanistan, where they will be deployed for six to nine months.

In 2009, when the initial team was sent to act as liaisons to the METF, living quarters, uniform and equipment requirements and the facilitation of other needs were established by the Alaska Army National Guard.

"As the mission has continued over the years, the needs of the Mongolian Expeditionary Team change, but our overall mission will remain the same: to ensure that support to the Mongolian Expeditionary Task Forces continues," Wonder said. "It's important that we remain flexible to the needs of the Mongolian Expeditionary Task Forces though, something they needed assistance with a year or two ago, they may not need this time around, but they may need assistance with something else and we have to be open to that."

Pacheco said that he's excited to have the opportunity to be part of the liaison team and feels it's a chance to help the Alaska Army National Guard shine.

"I feel good about this deployment," Pacheco said. "It's an amazing opportunity to work directly with coalition forces, learn about the Mongolian Expeditionary Task Forces common interests and work to ensure the mission is successful."

Since 2003, the Alaska State Partnership Program has continuously developed and maintained a relationship with the Mongolian Armed Forces from deployments to Iraq,

where the Alaska Army National Guard provided liaison officers to the Mongolian Expeditionary Task Forces there, to numerous joint military exercises and subject matter expert exchanges, which have provided insight and training.

The strong relationship between Mongolia and the Alaska Army National Guard prompted the Mongolian Armed Forces, when they volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan, to request liaison officers from the Alaska Army National Guard to facilitate their communication and cooperation between the U.S. and NATO elements there.

"Because of the Alaska State Partnership Program, many Alaska Army National Guardsmen have a better understanding of the Mongolian culture," Wonder said. "Because of this, Alaska Army National Guardsmen are uniquely qualified to act as U.S. representative liaisons and advisors to the Mongolians. Having a better understanding of the Mongolian culture and way of life will help us ensure that miscommunication or misunderstandings between the Mongolians and other U.S. and NATO elements during the deployment don't occur, or if they do, they are amicably rectified."

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